

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4810

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 1221

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MO

SUBJECT: 53 POLITICAL DETAINEES RELEASED

1. SOCIALIST UNION'S NEWSPAPER, AL MOHARRIR, ANNOUNCED OVER WEEKEND THAT 53 POLITICAL DETAINEES HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM JAILS ON MARCH 6 IN KENITRA, SAFI, MEKNES AND CASA-BLANCA. NO OTHER PAPER HAS REPORTED RELEASES AND IT APPEARS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT THOSE FREED HAVE SOME CONNECTION WITH SOCIALIST UNION. AL MOHARRIR HAILED MOVE AND RENEWED ITS CALL FOR RELEASE OF ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS.

2. AMONG THOSE LIBERATED, 8 WERE FROM GROUP TRIED BY KENITRA MILITARY TRIBUNAL IN CONNECTION WITH MARCH 1973 DISORDERS IN MIDDLE ATLAS AND TERRORISM IN RABAT AND CASA-BLANCA. SIX OF THESE (TWO TEACHERS, THREE FARMERS AND ONE CAFE WORKER) WERE CHARGED WITH INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE ATLAS DISTURBANCES. ALSO, ONE OF PERSONS RELEASED IN MEKNES MAY HAVE BEEN AMONG GROUP CONDEMNED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT IN ABSENTIA BY CASABLANCA COURT IN SEPTEMBER 1973 FOR PLOTTING AGAINST REGIME. THERE WERE REPORTS AT TIME CASABLANCA COURT HANDED DOWN VERDICT THAT SOME CONDEMNED IN ABSENTIA WERE IN FACT IN CUSTODY. WE HAVE NO RECORDS ON REMAINING 44 PERSONS AND ESTIMATE THAT THEY ARE SOME OF LARGER GROUP PICKED UP IN CONNECTION WITH MARCH 1973 EVENTS
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BUT NEVER CHARGED OR TRIED.

3. WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE LARGEST NUMBER OF RELEASES OF POLITICAL DETAINEES TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT ONE TIME SINCE SPRING OF 1974. THEY FOLLOW CLOSE ON HEELS OF FREEING OF CAID BEN HAMOU, A RESISTANCE FIGHTER AND PROBABLE SOCIALIST UNION SYMPATHIZER WHO WAS JAILED IN 1959, AND SENTENCED TO DEATH IN 1966, IN CONNECTION WITH MURDER OF POLICE OFFICIAL IN BENI MELLAL, BEN HAMOU'S SUPPOSED PARTNER IN THIS CRIME, SUPER CAID BACHIR BEN THAMI, WHO HAD ALSO BEEN CONDEMNED TO DEATH WAS RELEASED AT END OF RAMADAN IN OCTOBER 1974. THERE ARE ALSO SAID TO HAVE BEEN A FEW OTHER SCATTERED RELEASES DURING 1974 AND 1975 WHICH WERE NOT PUBLICIZED.

4. COMMENT: RELEASES, WHICH SOCIALIST UNION LEADER INDICATED TO US WERE EXPECTED, ARE CONCRETE EVIDENCE THAT THERE IS SOME MOVEMENT ON POLITICAL PRISONER FRONT. POLITICAL TRIALS WERE AT ONE TIME EXPECTED IN MEKNES AND CASABLANCA AND RELEASES SUGGEST STRONGLY THAT THESE ACTIONS HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED.

5. REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER PALACE AND SOCIALIST UNION HAVE REACHED SOME SORT OF BROADER UNDERSTANDING INVOLVING REGIME FORTHCOMINGNESS ON POLITICAL PRISONER ISSUE IN RETURN FOR TACIT SOCIALIST UNION ACQUIESCENCE IN DECISION TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS. IN CONTRAST WITH ISTIQLAL, WHOSE LEADERSHIP RENEWED AT GREAT LENGTH OVER WEEKEND ITS CALL FOR ELECTIONS, SOCIALIST UNION HAS NOT TAKEN STRONG PUBLIC POSITION ON ELECTION QUESTION SINCE KING ANNOUNCED POSTPONEMENT. IN RECENT COLLOQUIUM, SOCIALIST UNION LEADER BOUABID, WHEN ASKED ABOUT ELECTIONS, BRIEFLY REAFFIRMED HIS GROUP'S INTEREST IN SEEING THEM HELD BUT KEPT HIS REMARKS IN VERY LOW KEY.
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